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EDITORIALS†

PUBLIC HEALTH EXHIBITS IN STATE AND COUNTY FAIRS: SYPHILIS EXHIBIT AT SACRAMENTO STATE FAIR

Syphilis Exhibit Visited by Hundreds of Citizens.—Several weeks ago, members of the California State Board of Public Health visited the Sacramento State Fair in order to observe for themselves the public's reaction to a syphilis exhibit which had been installed. It was gratifying to note that the display, in spite of not being elaborate, was surrounded by citizens in lines of two and three deep, who were reading the placards, helping themselves to educational leaflets, or signing their names on confidential request cards for further information. The sign over the exhibit contained the single word, SYPHILIS, in massive letters that could be read a city block away. In view of the attitude of the lay press in tabooing the word "syphilis" (a few newspapers only, in the last year or so, having at last had the courage to print articles about the disease), the interest displayed among the Fair visitors, by both men and women, was most illuminating. It is an indication that this disease, responsible for such a vast amount of primary and secondary disease and death, and for so long a period under taboo in all circles other than medical, is scheduled to take a lesser rôle in future morbidity and mortality tables, just as happened in the warfare against tuberculosis. It is heartening, also, to know that people at large have this honesty of approach in relation to lues, presenting an example that newspapers might well follow. In time, no doubt, the press will likewise see the light, and the aid of the lay editors will make for larger results in the antisiphilis campaigns* of education that must be carried on, for years to come, if ultimate victory is to be won.

* * *

How One Phase of the Syphilis Problem Is Being Solved by San Diego's Health Officer.

In a conversation concerning the solution of the syphilis problem, at the recent San Jose meeting of municipal health officers, Dr. A. M. Lesem of San Diego outlined to us the steps he had taken to

† Editorials on subjects of scientific and clinical interest, contributed by members of the California Medical Association, are printed in the Editorial Comment column which follows.

* Concerning the campaign recently inaugurated against syphilis by the United States Public Health Service, the article concerning Dr. William F. Snow, in the Special Articles department of this issue should be of interest (see page 280).

eliminate syphilitic food handlers in his community. The enforcement of San Diego inspection ordinance made it possible for him to learn the names of food handlers afflicted with syphilis, and all such persons were notified to report to the department clinic for instructions. There, an earnest effort was made to learn from whom the disease had been contracted, with penalty of loss of position if information was refused. When the food handler gave cooperation, he was sent to his physician for treatment, and, through the medical reports, a consistent check was maintained concerning the patient's progress. If, however, the food handler discontinued treatment before release by his physician, he was promptly notified to come to the department's syphilis clinic for examination. If further treatment was indicated, and the patient refused it, he was informed that if he continued in his occupation as a food handler, the penalties prescribed in the city's ordinance would be instituted. Prompt cooperation was the usual result. One other point, as regards success in work of this kind, and stressed by Dr. Lesem, was the importance of the health officer working in thorough understanding and accord with the members of his county medical association, a factor of importance, worthy of remembrance, not only by all public health officials, but also by physicians in private practice.

As regards the decrease in syphilis incidence, many physicians are skeptical of good results being possible; and well they may be, if the old methods of attack are to be used. However, if we can learn who are the citizens who have syphilis; and if then a real endeavor is made to reach the person responsible for the primary infection, so that this important person in the casual relationship may also be placed under observation and treatment, and if procedures exist through which the treatment may be properly maintained, with penalties for noncooperation, then real progress in overcoming syphilis may be attained. Of course, in private practice, the problem takes on more difficult aspects than in the supervision of food handlers, where ordinances with penalty provisions make it possible to initiate disciplinary action along lines above indicated.

* * *

Educational Campaign Will Bring Results.—The outlook, however, is not disheartening. We need only remind ourselves that less than a half-century ago it was the vogue in many communities for certain families to attempt to conceal or deny the existence of tuberculosis when it was present, in order to avoid the stigma of having a consumptive in the family! The morbidity and mortality rates of tuberculosis of fifty and twenty-five years ago were much higher than those of the present day. Why? The answer is found in the educational campaign—in which Christmas seals have played no small part—that has created a new approach to tuberculosis for both physicians and lay citizens. So, also, equally good results in overcoming syphilis and gonorrhea may be realized, if adequate educational and other necessary measures are inaugurated.

State and County Fairs a Logical Place for Public Health Exhibits.—To return, however, to the value of state and county fairs as measures of educating the citizenry of California on matters pertaining to the public health. More than ten years ago, Doctor Hay of Nebraska, at a meeting of secretaries and editors of state medical associations, held in the American Medical Association headquarters at Chicago, told of the good results through exhibits at fairs held in his state. Since then, comment has been made on this subject in the *OFFICIAL JOURNAL* on a number of occasions, and it is to be hoped that at an early day adequate funds and appropriations may be secured for the development and maintenance of public health exhibits in the state and county fairs of California. These fairs are annually visited by hundreds of thousands of citizens, and their splendid buildings make easily available the dissemination of information on public health matters, so much needed by the six million citizens of the state. If the industrial and agricultural interests of California find the state and county fairs worthy of such continued support, why should they not be an equally good field for salesmanship in the dissemination of public health knowledge?

* * *

Public Health Exhibits at Golden Gate International Exposition.—In this connection, plans of broad scope should be made for public health exhibits at the Golden Gate International Exhibition in 1939; along lines, or better, if possible, than those which excited so much favorable comment at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. Members of the Association who have suggestions to offer on the nature and scope of public health exhibits are requested to send the same to the offices of the California Medical Association and to the California State Board of Public Health, the addresses of which are always printed in the rosters which are given place in each issue in the front advertising section of the *OFFICIAL JOURNAL*. The officers of both organizations will appreciate such cooperation.

THE PASSING OF A GREAT EDITOR: GEORGE H. SIMMONS, 1852-1937

Essential Elements in the American Medical Association's Reorganization Plan of 1901.—The death, on September 1, of the editor and general manager emeritus of *The Journal of the American Medical Association* brings to the minds of the older members of the medical profession the important services which the late Dr. George H. Simmons rendered to organized and scientific medicine. Few physicians, in their day, have been subjected to the attacks he went through, and it is to the credit of the American Medical Association, that in 1894, when Doctor Simmons laid down the responsibilities of the offices of editor and general manager of the American Medical Association, the American Medical Association trustees maintained his name in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* as editor and general manager emeritus. For to his great influence with